

TOPAZ:

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deal with. They were forced to endure deprivation such as many had never known — they had been an elite people, some of them wealthy, all of them proud.

Chizu Kitano Iiyama spoke of the beautiful part of being in the camp — the friendships she made. She told how she, in her early 20s, would meet in the bathroom with other girls at night to talk where it was private, and also because, on winter nights, it was the only place that was warm.

She recalled the beauty of the nights, when all was quiet. It was also lonely, she stated, because it was so dark. The coyotes would howl, a frightening sound which none were acquainted with. She said that even today she will often see, hear or smell something that will remind of her "camp;" sometimes a ray of sunshine streaming through a bank of clouds, the sight of a snow-capped peak.

The difficulty of courting was remembered with much humor. About the only place they would take their dates was on a tour around the barbed-wire fence, which encircled the whole commu-

felt they had a larger picture of the war effort, citing the example of the Jews in Germany. But also, they felt shunned because they sometimes weren't considered Americans. Now, however, most feel that by having different culture ties, they can be better American citizens.

One who attended the reunion who was not Japanese said they were feared by the people in the Delta area, because of some of the news reports that had circulated, and also because of lessons being taught by society that they should not befriend those who were not like them.

Those fears didn't last long, however, as the people of the area opened their hearts and homes to their new friends.

During their three-year encampment, many internees were allowed to leave the camp and help with the farm work in the surrounding communities. They worked alongside, ate with, and became lasting friends with those they worked for. Those friendships have now endured many years.

During their pilgrimage to the camp site Sunday, momentos were gathered by those who walked the site, remembering: a piece of barbed wire, the handle of a cup, rocks. It was a happy-sad few

interested to tour and reminisce.

A program at the site further enhanced the occasion, and was attended by many living in the West Millard area, as well as the honored guests, the Japanese who once lived in Topaz.

Eleanor Gerard Sekarak had taught in the high school at Topaz, and told of her love for her students. She said some of the memories of that time are fading a bit, but she has kept in touch with some of her former students.

She recalled, too, some of the burdens the students faced as they came to a strange area, forced to leave behind their home, friends, schools, and make the changes in their lives. Those students, under the guidance of their teachers, were determined their academic pursuits would continue to flourish.

Those witnessing the ceremony were given two admonitions: to talk to their children and let them know what Topaz was about, and also to help preserve Topaz.

Lawson Inada, Sansei poet and author, said Topaz was most likely the most creative of all the internment camps, with artists and musicians and writers continuing their skills.

Inada also praised the older people who had lived in the camp, as

having tremendous optimism, and for their encouragement of continuity through the generations.

A museum is being established in Delta, housed in a barracks building, which will show the meaning of that time.

Paul Bell spoke to the group at the Sunday evening banquet. Bell was a caucasian student at Topaz. His father was given the assignment to organize an agricultural program for the Japanese, to enable them to work and provide for themselves. Bell related how as a student he played football for the high school team, being the tallest on the team, of course. He noticed how the residents of Topaz suffered, and not always in the same way.

He said he was grateful for the Saturday 'sharing time,' as it gave him a greater insight into their trials, even though he had lived among them. He praised them for persevering, and thanked them for letting him be a part of their lives.

At the end of the evening's events, a special tribute was given to honor those internees who have died. Everyone stood and raised their hands and said the word 'bonsai' three times, a Japanese tribute to those they honor.

Topaz barracks offered bleak living conditions

By LYRAINE JONES
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Upon their arrival at Topaz, the Japanese internees were greeted with a bleak site.

The living quarters consisted of a one-room apartment for each family, measuring approximately 20'x20'. There were six apartments to a barrack, which was nothing more than a tarpaper building, with no insulation or siding.

In each apartment was a ceiling light, a pot-bellied stove, and a closet. There were cots with mattresses, one for each person. No more furniture than that.

There were 12 barracks to a block, and 36 residential blocks. Every block had its own dining room, laundry, showers, and toilets. The whole compound was neatly laid out, encompassing 17,500 acres.

Ironically, a Japanese architect, Hachiro Yuasa, was given the assignment by the Farm Se-

curity Association in California, to draw up plans for the buildings the government planned to erect at Topaz, fearing war was imminent. He then was one of the residents of that community. Essentially, he planned for his own interment.

Not all the buildings were complete, however, when the new residents began arriving. Consequently, the first rainstorm was a disaster.

The internees themselves were required to finish their own apartments. They arrived in such great numbers there hadn't been time to fully prepare for them.

In spite of those less than desirable conditions, the residents of this new community decided they would make the best of it. They planted gardens, and they grew, as if in defiance of the elements. With whatever scrap wood they could gather they made chairs, tables and any other furniture they might need. They were resourceful.